

## Chapter 8

### *The City of God* (413-426)

#### Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the most important Christian philosopher and theologian of late antiquity. Born in Roman North Africa, the son of a pagan father and a devoutly Christian mother [St. Monica], Augustine himself remained pagan until adulthood. Although his family was not rich, he was sent for schooling at Carthage, where he developed a taste and aptitude for philosophy. At the age of thirty-two, he converted to Christianity and became a priest in 391. He recounted the story of his inner struggles in *The Confessions* (ca. 400), one of the most famous of all Christian autobiographies. In 396, Augustine was consecrated Bishop of Hippo, a position he held until his death. There he combined pastoral duties with the writing of major theological and philosophical works. His great achievement was a synthesis of classical and Christian traditions. He died when Hippo was besieged by the Vandals in 430.

*The City of God* (413-426) was Augustine's major work. It provides a summary of Christian thought at the moment when the Roman Empire was under siege and has become the heart of the Catholic Church's doctrines. His work was particularly important to Catholics in the Middle Ages. Augustine contrasts the world of corruption and sin inhabited by humans with God's world of blissful perfection.

#### Questions

1. How do you think that Augustine's background as an urban Roman affected his thought?
2. What is the difference between the city of God and the earthly city?
3. How, according to Augustine, do people become "residents" of the city of God?
4. Augustine does not envisage a community of social equals in the city of God. Would this, in Augustine's view, lead to conflict? Why or why not?
5. There are several clues in *The City of God* about the nature of society in late classical cities: Augustine makes assumptions about social status, for example. Judging from his work, what might you say about the real cities that Augustine knew?

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*Of that part of the work wherein the demonstration of the beginnings and ends of the two cities, the heavenly and the earthly, are declared:*

We give the name of the city of God unto that society whereof that scripture bears witness, which has gained the most exalted authority and pre-eminence over all other works whatsoever, by the disposing of the divine providence, not the chance decisions of men's judgments. For there it is said: 'Glorious things are of spoken of thee, thou city of God': and in another place: 'Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, even upon His holy mountain, increasing the joy of all the earth.' And by and by in the same psalm: 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God: God has established it for ever.' And in another: 'The rivers' streams shall make glad the city of God, the most High sanctified His tabernacle, God is in the midst of it unmoved.'

These testimonies, and thousands more, teach us that there is a city of God, whereof His inspired love makes us desire to be members. The earthly citizens prefer their gods before this heavenly city's holy Founder, knowing not that He is the God of gods, not of those false, wicked, and proud ones, (which lacking His light so universal and unchangeable, and being thereby reduced to a state of extreme need, each one follows his own state, as it were, and begs divine honors of his deluded servants), but of the godly and holy ones, who select their own submission to Him, rather than the world's to them, and love

1 rather to worship Him their God, than to be worshipped for gods themselves. And now, knowing what is  
2 next expected of me, as my promise – viz. [namely, that is to say] to dispute (as far as my poor talent  
3 allows) of the origin, progress, and consummation of the two cities that in this world lie confusedly  
4 together, by the assistance of the same God and King of ours, I set pen to paper, intending first to show  
5 the beginning of these two, arising from the difference between the angelical powers.

### 6 7 **The state of the two cities, the heavenly and the earthly** 8

9 Two loves therefore have given origin to these two cities, self-love in contempt of God unto the  
10 earthly, love of God in contempt of one's self to the heavenly. The first seeks the glory of men, and the  
11 latter desires God only as the testimony of the conscience, the greatest glory. That [the earthly city]  
12 glories in itself, and this [the heavenly city] in God. That exalts itself in self-glory: this says to God: 'My  
13 glory and the lifter up of my head.' That boasts of the ambitious conquerors led by the lust of sovereignty:  
14 in this all serve each other in charity, both the rulers in counseling and the subjects in obeying. That loves  
15 worldly virtue in the potentates: this says unto God: 'I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.' And the wise  
16 men of that follow either the good things of the body, or mind, or both: living according to the flesh; and  
17 such as might know God; 'honored Him not as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their own  
18 imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; for professing themselves to be wise, that is, extolling  
19 themselves proudly in their wisdom, they became fools; changing the glory of the incorruptible God to  
20 the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds and four-footed beasts and serpents': for they  
21 were the people's guides or followers unto all those idolatries, and served the creature more than the  
22 Creator who is blessed for ever. But in this other, this heavenly city, there is no wisdom of man, but only  
23 the piety that serves the true God and expects a reward in the society of the holy angels, and men, that  
24 God may be all in all.

### 25 26 **Of the two contrary courses taken by the human race from the beginning** 27

28 Of the place and felicity of the local paradise, together with man's life and fall therein, there are  
29 many opinions, many assertions, and many books, as several men thought, spoke, and wrote. What we  
30 held hereof, or could gather out of holy scriptures, correspondent unto their truth and authority, we related  
31 in some of the foregoing books. If they be farther looked into, they will give birth to more questions and  
32 longer disputations than we have now room for. Our time is not so large as to permit us to argue  
33 scrupulously upon every question that may be asked by busy heads that are more curious of inquiry than  
34 capable of understanding. I think we have sufficiently discussed the doubts concerning the beginning of  
35 the world, the soul, and mankind; which last is divided into two sorts, such as live according to man, and  
36 such as live according to God. These we mystically call two cities or societies, the one predestined to  
37 being eternally with God, the other condemned in perpetual torment with the devil. This is their end, of  
38 which hereafter.

39  
40 Now seeing we have said sufficient concerning their origin, both in the angels whose number we  
41 know not, and in the two first parents of mankind, I think it fit to pass on to their progression from man's  
42 first offspring until he cease to beget anymore. All the time included between these two points, wherein  
43 the livers ever succeed the diers, is the progression of these two cities. Cain therefore was the first  
44 begotten of those two that were mankind's parents, and he belongs to the city man; Abel was the later,  
45 and he belongs to the city of God. For as we see that in an individual man (as the apostle says) that which  
46 is spiritual is not first, but that which is natural first, and then the spiritual (whereupon all that comes from  
47 Adam's corrupted nature must needs be evil and carnal at first, and then if a man be regenerate by Christ,  
48 becomes good and spiritual afterward): so in the first propagation of man, and progression of the two  
49 cities of which we dispute, the carnal citizen was born first, and the pilgrim on earth or heavenly citizen  
50 afterwards, being by grace predestined, and by grace elected, by grace a pilgrim upon earth, and by grace  
51 a citizen in heaven. For as for his birth; it was out of the same corrupted mass that was condemned from

1 the beginning; but God like a potter (for this simile the apostle himself uses) out of the same lump, made  
2 'one vessel to honor and another to reproach.' The vessel of reproach was made first, and the vessel of  
3 honor afterwards. For in each individual, as I said, there is first reprobation, whence we must needs begin  
4 (and wherein we need not remain), and afterwards goodness, to which we come by profiting, and coming  
5 thither therein make our abode. Whereupon it follows that no one can be good that has not first been evil,  
6 though all that be evil become not good; but the sooner a man betters himself the quicker does this name  
7 follow him, abolishing the memory of the other.

9 Therefore, it is recorded of Cain that he built a city, but Abel was a pilgrim, and built none. For  
10 the city of the saints is above, though it have citizens here upon earth, wherein it lives as a pilgrim until  
11 the time of the kingdom come; and then it gathers all the citizens together in the resurrection of the body,  
12 and gives them a kingdom to reign in with their King for ever and ever.

### 14 **Of the sons of the flesh and the sons of promise**

16 The shadow and prophetic image of this city (not making it present but signifying it) served  
17 here upon earth, at the time when such a foreshadowing was needed; and was called the holy city, because  
18 it was a symbol of the city that was to be, though not the reality. Of this city serving as an image, and the  
19 free city herein prefigured, the apostle speaks thus unto the Galatians: 'Tell me, ye that desire to be under  
20 the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a bondwoman, and  
21 the other by a free: but the son of the bondwoman was born of the flesh, and the son of the freewoman by  
22 promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two Testaments, the one given from Mount Sinai,  
23 begetting man in servitude, which is Hagar; for Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, joined to the Jerusalem on  
24 earth, for it serves with her children.

26 But our mother the celestial Jerusalem is free, for it is written: "Rejoice, thou barren bearest not:  
27 break forth into joy, and cry out, thou that travailest not with child, for the desolate hath many more  
28 children than the married wife." But we, brethren, are the sons of promise to Isaac. But as then he that  
29 was born of the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now. But what says the  
30 scripture? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the bondwoman's son shall not be heir with the  
31 freewoman's." Then, brethren, we are no children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Thus the apostle  
32 authorizes us to conceive of the Old and New Testaments. For a part of the earthly city was made an  
33 image of the heavenly, not signifying itself but another, and therefore serving: for it was not ordained to  
34 signify itself but another, and itself was signified by another precedent type; for Hagar, Sarah's servant,  
35 and her son, were an image hereof. And because, when the light comes, the shadows must flee away,  
36 Sarah the freewoman signifying the free city (which that shadow of the earthly Jerusalem signified in  
37 another manner) said: 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the bondwoman's son shall not be heir  
38 with my son Isaac': whom the apostle calls the freewoman's son.

40 Thus then we find this earthly city in two forms; the one presenting itself, and the other  
41 prefiguring the celestial city, and serving it. Our nature corrupted by sin produces citizens of earth; and  
42 grace freeing us from the sin of nature makes us citizens of heaven: the first are called the vessels of  
43 wrath, the last of mercy. And this was signified in the two sons of Abraham, the one of whom being born  
44 of the bondwoman was called Ishmael, being the son of the flesh; the other, the freewoman's, Isaac, the  
45 son of promise. Both were Abraham's sons; but natural custom begot the first, and gracious promise the  
46 latter. In the first was a demonstration of man's use, in the second was a revelation of God's goodness.

### 48 **Of the eternal felicity of the city of God, and the perpetual Sabbath**

50 How great shall that felicity be, where there shall be no evil thing, where no good thing shall lie  
51 hidden, where we shall have leisure to utter forth the praises of God, which shall be all things in all! There

1 shall be true glory where no man shall be praised for error or flattery. True honor, which shall be denied  
2 unto none which is worthy, shall be given unto none unworthy. But neither shall any unworthy person  
3 covet after it, where none is permitted to be but he who is worthy. There is true peace, where no man  
4 suffers anything which may molest him, either from himself or from any other. He Himself shall be  
5 reward of virtue, who has given virtue, and has promised Himself unto him, than whom nothing can be  
6 better and greater. For what other thing is that which He has said by the prophet: 'I will be their God, and  
7 they shall be My people'; but "I will be whereby they shall be satisfied: I will be whatsoever is lawfully  
8 desired of men, life, health, food, abundance, glory, honor, peace, and all good things'? For so also is that  
9 rightly understood, which the apostle says: 'That God may be all in all.' He shall be the end of our  
10 desires, who shall be seen without end, who shall be loved without any disgust, and praised without any  
11 tediousness. This function, this affection, this action verily shall be unto all, as the eternal life shall be  
12 common to all.

13  
14 But who is sufficient to think, much less to utter, what degrees there shall also be of the rewards  
15 for merits, of the honors and glories? But we must not doubt but that there shall be degrees. And also that  
16 blessed city shall see this in itself – that no inferior shall envy his superior, even as now the other angels  
17 do not envy the archangels; as every one will not wish to be what he has not received, although he be  
18 bound in a most peaceable bond of concord with him who has received, even as the finger does not wish  
19 to be the eye in the body, since a peaceable conjunction and knitting together of the whole flesh contains  
20 both members. Therefore one shall so have a gift less than another has, that he also has this further gift  
21 that he does not wish to have any more. By Him being restored and perfected with a greater grace we  
22 shall rest for ever, seeing that He is God, with whom we shall be replenished, when He shall be all in all.